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DEPT FOR NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: CASABLANCANS REACT TO CONTINUED POST CLOSURE

REF: A. RABAT 898

[1](#)B. CASA 095

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Thomas T Riley for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In the more than five weeks since two suicide bombers detonated near the Consulate General, the atmosphere among the populace has gone from sympathetic concern to frustration and anger. Even many Moroccans who offered support immediately after the explosions now feel that the continued closure to the public is an overreaction that will ultimately harm relations between the two longtime friends. Local newspapers highlight the &humiliation8 of Moroccans having to apply for visas elsewhere (especially Tunis) and speculate on what it may mean for Morocco and Moroccans in the long term. The apparent ability of the generally subordinate Casablanca City Council to suddenly veto the Ministry of Interior agreement to close one lane of traffic in front to the Consulate may be a reflection of the degree to which these views are held by elements of the GOM. Embassy contacts have speculated that the City Council, not previously known to be an entity of any serious political weight, may be serving as a proxy for other interests or concerns. On a positive note, following some measures taken by the government, Dar America, the separately located hole of Casa PAS, re-opened for staff May 20. If all goes smoothly we plan to open it to the public soon. End Summary.

Even our Friends are Turning Away

[1](#)2. (SBU) Immediately after the April 14 bombings, many Moroccans expressed their concern to and for members of Post staff. While this concern was not shared by all Casabancans, many offered their sympathy over the attacks and reminded us that Morocco has always been a friend to the U.S. However, as Post remains closed for visa services, even those who voiced sympathy now appear to harbor growing frustration and resentment with the consulate and the U.S. in general.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Since the outset, there have been some who believed the closure was an overreaction to an insignificant event. That sentiment has flourished and seems now to be almost universal. One contact who called to convey her sympathy within an hour of the bombings now gets almost angry whenever the continued closure is broached. She feels it is unjustified at this point. Another Moroccan/American contact said many people are vowing never to visit the U.S. due to the &disrespect8 shown to Moroccans by requiring them to travel to other countries to apply for visas.

Denial of the Problem

¶4. (C) Overreaction is the word of the hour as Moroccans become more convinced that the bombings were the work of an inexperienced rogue group which had no plan to initiate a jihad but were just misguided poor Moroccans looking for attention. If they were really trying to attack the U.S. one contact told us, then why did they blow themselves up on Saturday when there was no one around, and why so far away from the building.8 (NOTE: The first explosion occurred across the street where visa applicants and American citizens line up for security pre-screening. The second was in front of the American Language Center which was filled with Moroccan youth studying English).

¶5. (SBU) Most Moroccans we spoke to believe that while there may be a few extremists in Casablanca, the GOM has the situation under control and the city will not become another Algiers. Its just not possible for there to be that level of terrorism in Morocco.8 one storeowner in Casablanca stated, its against our culture.8 However, the GOM has announced it will add 3,000 police to the Casablanca force in the coming months--an indication of how seriously it views the problem.

Hurt Feelings and More

¶6. (SBU) Local press (both French and Arabic) commentary has described the continued closure as a humiliation for Morocco, an affront to its citizens, and evidence that the U.S. is once again overstepping its bounds by meddling in Moroccan internal affairs in asking the city of Casablanca to close one of its major roadways(note: not our current position). Abdelmouneim Dilami, director of the largest private media conglomerate in Morocco and generally friendly to the USG, wrote in a widely-cited editorial that the closure was a slap in the face of a once good friend. The press also draws a pointed contrast between perceived official Moroccan silence in the face of these "humiliations," in contrast with the strong and sharp Algerian Government response to a warden message issued in April warning Amcits about potential security threats. These sentiments are being publicly echoed throughout the city amplifying anti-American sentiment.

¶7. (C) One close Embassy contact speculated that the Mayor and City Council may be serving as proxies for other interests. One such interest would be the Islamic Party for Justice and Development, to whom the Casablanca mayor reportedly owes his election, and upon whom he may rely for his political future. Increasing anti-Americanism would be viewed as an asset for the PJD in this year's parliamentary elections, since the PJD has staked out a position of strong opposition to U.S. foreign policy. Other Rabat contacts indicated that socialists on the council were being obstructive to politically capitalize on anti-Americanism.

¶8. (C) Comment: It is difficult to ascertain what is truly behind the GOM,s decision to renege on the agreement to close one lane of traffic for half a block in front of the Consulate. The apparent ability of the heretofore clearly subordinate Casablanca City Council to suddenly veto the Ministry of Interior,s agreement with the Mission to close the lane to traffic is puzzling, although they are known to have some say on traffic matters. It may be a reflection of views held by top elements of the GOM, making the City Council action a handy reason to deny the request. We could not rule out that the government, while circumspect in its public and bilateral comment, could be feeding the press frenzy. Frequent charges in the press that the GOM is unwilling to stand up to the U.S. may be an additional motivating factor. While Casablanicans are annoyed by the status quo, they remain relatively quiet for now. Urgent visa requests (e.g. Ministries, the Wali of Rabat (for

personal travel), businessmen, returning students, and a new crop of students planning to attend college in the US) are already piling up and will get worse each week the consulate remains closed. End Comment.

This cable was drafted by Amconsul Casablanca and cleared through Embassy.

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